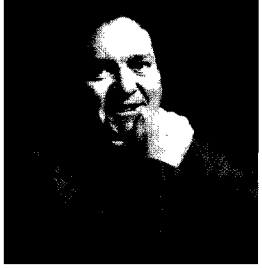


Netwatch

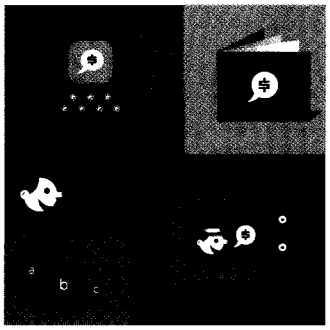
By Jim Carroll

Your guide to business & accounting on the Internet

Virtual TV

I've heard quite a few Hollywood movies lately. I've never actually seen any of these films, but I've heard them, which makes me part of a unique generation of parents who spends a good chunk of time driving while our children watch videos from the back seat of the car. You see, we're the first generation with kids to benefit from in-car, back-seat built-in DVD technology.

As a skiing family, each winter we drive back and forth to our place up north. With a focus on parenting, my wife makes sure the first hour or two of each drive is spent on homework before the DVD goes in and the boys get to "watch TV."



The concept of television as we know it has forever disappeared with this trend toward back-seat viewing. Indeed, we are seeing the emergence of an entire generation for whom the concept of watching their favourite shows on TV in their living room will soon be outdated.

Television is now a virtual product found almost everywhere you look: in the backseat of cars, on laptops, iPods and implanted in the backs of seats in airplanes.

To kids, TV is portable, an amorphous thing that happens to be anywhere and everywhere. And I, too, am beginning to shape television viewing to my schedule, rather than the other way around — that's why the marriage of cable-company time-shifting with a simple DVD recorder has been a blessing in disguise.

As a Rogers Cable customer, I took advantage of the company's offer to watch any episode of *The Sopranos* at any time and dumped the entire season onto a few DVDs. Once I finished that series, I discovered other great HBO-televised programs, such as *Big Love* and *Sleeper Cell*, and recorded those en masse too. I've since conveniently downloaded seven airplane rides' worth of television programming for my entertainment, definitely making flying a much more tolerable experience.

And I'm not alone. There are lots of people doing this sort of thing at home with products such as TiVO, the unique little box that allows you to shift your preferred TV viewing to your schedule. If you're not doing it with TV, check out Microsoft Windows Media Center XP. I ended up with this program when we upgraded our computer system in the kitchen. Microsoft Windows Media Center XP has enabled me to become a big fan of Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show.* I record the program to the hard disk of my computer each night before I travel, then I use a nifty little tool called the DRVMSToolbox to convert each show into a small file that I can use with, and watch on, my laptop. Since you can zip past all of the commercials, each half-hour television program equals approximately 15 minutes of in-flight entertainment for me.

You can also learn everything you need to know about Media Center XP at The Green Button. While Microsoft receives criticism for some of the buggy software it comes out with, Media Center XP is actually a brilliant system.

If you don't want to get a new PC in order to receive Microsoft Windows Media XP, check out Beyond TV Snapstream, an inexpensive USB-based TV-tuner that costs approximately $90.

Jim Carroll, FCA, is a well-known speaker, author and columnist. Reach him at jcarroll@jimcarroll.com or log on to his website at www.jimcarroll.com

PORTABLE TV OPTIONS AT YOUR SERVICE

Microsoft Windows XP Media Center Edition http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/mediacenter/default.mspx

DRVMSToolbox at The Green Button http://thegreenbutton.com/

Beyond TV Snapstream http://www.snapstream.com